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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 003073

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KIRF](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: PRC: BEIJING TARGETS KEY HOUSE CHURCHES

Classified By: Political Section Chief Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Recent developments suggest that the Beijing municipal government is increasing its scrutiny and harassment of certain well-known unofficial house churches and house church leaders. The authorities dismissed a central government research institute scholar, allegedly for his ties to house churches, and continue to harass a well-known Beijing house church community. Meanwhile, other house churches in Beijing report no increase in interference by authorities. End Summary.

#### CASS Scholar with House Church Ties Dismissed

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¶2. (C) On November 3, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) dismissed Dr. Fan Yafeng from his position as a CASS Law Institute scholar. Dr. Fan is a constitutional scholar who has long worked on religious freedom issues and holds a leadership position at the unofficial house church he attends. On November 4, Dr. Fan told an officer from the German Embassy in Beijing that, while at CASS, he had been under constant political pressure. He said he had always known he could be fired, but could not identify a specific catalyst for his dismissal at this time. Fan, who has ties to the NGO community, stated that he planned to continue his work on religious issues in that sector. (Note: While other CASS scholars have house church ties, Fan is the only one we know who has been dismissed to date. A Beijing-based American consultant working on religious issues told PolOff November 6 that the distinguishing factor in Fan's case is that while other CASS scholars may attend house church services, Fan himself is a house church leader.)

#### Prominent Beijing House Church Out on the Street

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¶3. (C) The Shouwang Church, a large and well-known Beijing house church, which previously met in leased space in a commercial shopping center, was recently displaced after its landlords were reportedly threatened by municipal officials with tax violations if they continued to rent to the church. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) scholar Liu Peng told PolOff October 24 that Beijing municipal offices of the Public Security Bureau, Religious Affairs Bureau, Tax Bureau, and Commercial Bureau had informed Shouwang's landlords that they would be investigated if they continued renting to the church. On October 31, the church's lease was not renewed.

¶4. (C) After losing the lease, approximately 500 Shouwang parishioners held a church service Sunday, November 1, at the front gate of Beijing's Haidian Park. Attendees reported no interference by authorities but did witness individuals they assumed were plainclothes police videotaping the service and photographing worshipers. November 8 services, reportedly attended by approximately 700-1,000 worshipers, took place at the same outdoor location. On November 9, the Beijing-based

American consultant told PolOff that Shouwang,s pastor and founder, Pastor Jin Tianming, had been temporarily detained on November 8, and was released after the conclusion of the service.

¶15. (C) Shouwang Church leaders continue to seek a long-term solution through the purchase of a building. To date, the church has raised twenty million of the thirty million RMB needed. Shouwang church leaders have repeatedly told international religious NGOs that they believe direct contact with either the U.S. Embassy in Beijing or other U.S. officials could be detrimental to reaching a solution to their problems. Shouwang has also discouraged U.S.-based NGO advocacy on their behalf noting such advocacy, too, could harm their interests. After losing the lease, however, Shouwang Church leaders have made clear that they would welcome participation by the international community and the international media at future outdoor services.

Government Campaign against House Churches?

¶16. (C) On October 24, CASS scholar Liu Peng noted that harassment of Shouwang Church might be a result of a Beijing municipal government initiative being advanced by new Deputy Mayor Ding Xiangyang and Beijing Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) Director Dr. Shen Jianjun. In Liu's assessment, both Ding and Shen had little substantive knowledge of religious issues and even less experience with religious congregations.

Other House Churches Meetings as Normal

BEIJING 00003073 002 OF 002

¶17. (C) In contrast to Shouwang's current difficulties, other, smaller, Beijing house churches reported continuing to meet without problems. In September, PolOff met with human rights lawyer and house church activist Li Baiguang (protect), who was unaware of any coordinated policy of closing or harassing house churches by municipal authorities in Beijing. Li, who frequently provides legal assistance to house church leaders, said he was aware of only one recent house church closing, which occurred in August in Nanyang, Henan province. Li's own small house church continued to meet every Sunday in Beijing without problems, Li told us.

¶18. (C) Also in September, a U.S. consultant working to establish campus ministries who has close ties to Beijing house church leaders told PolOff that her associate Song Yingquan (protect), the pastor of one of the largest house churches in the Beijing University district, had reported that they had not encountered any official harassment since before the August 2008 Olympics. The church continued to hold services for several hundred worshippers every weekend. Other leaders of small house churches in Beijing also reported no new trouble or pressure.

HUNTSMAN